

La Follette and the Negro

A Consistent Record of 35 Years

From 1889 to 1924



"Negroes constitute one-tenth of our population. They constitute an inherent element in our national life. The language, the law, the religion, the traditions of the United States are their heritage. They know no other country, owe allegiance to no other flag. There is no call for their Americanization other than the observance of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution."—La Follette's Magazine, May, 1923.

La Follette and the Negro

This is *not* a statement by Senator La Follette in order to *get votes* in his campaign for the Presidency. Anyone can make statements during a political campaign in order to get support.

What really counts is not where a candidate jumps two months before election, but where a candidate has **stood** during the years before he began seeking the Presidency. Senator La Follette's record for **35 years** shows that he has steadily stood for justice to the Negroes, and has insisted that they be guaranteed the same civil rights and the same opportunities for education and livelihood that other citizens possess.

It should be remembered that the voters who have supported La Follette during his whole political career have been in Wisconsin, where the Negro vote has been and is very small. **He did not need, in order to get votes, to make any statement on the Negro problem which was not sincere.**

The facts about what he has said and done on Negro questions **throughout his political career** are more convincing than any **sudden profession** of friendship for the colored people by the Republican and Democratic candidates.

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Away back in 1889, when Robert M. La Follette was a member of the House of Representatives, there was a bitter contest of the election of General Robert Smalls (colored) as a Representative from South Carolina. In the debate La Follette said:

"There is nothing threatening or portentous in the Negro problem today, excepting as you make it so. The difficulty does not lie with him, but with you instead, in the blind prejudice and stubborn antagonism, ever opposed to his development politically and socially as a citizen. * * *

"If the colored people had been fairly treated, if they had received kindly recognition, if they had been provided with schools and books and teachers, if they had been given an opportunity to make homes for themselves, if their labor had been properly rewarded, who doubts that the progress they would have made in twenty-five years would have astonished the world?"

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La Follette was the first Governor of Wisconsin to appoint a Negro to a responsible office. The late William Miller, a most highly respected colored citizen, was named by Governor La Follette for a position in the Governor's office, and every administration since has followed his lead in recognizing the right of our colored citizens to serve the state in political office.

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Confirmation of the appointment of Walter I. Cohen (colored) as Comptroller of the Port of New Orleans in March, 1924, was due to the efforts of Senator La Follette.

Klan

Endorses { COOLIDGE
DAVIS
Opposes—LA FOLLETTE

Dr. Hiriam W. Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Klan, in a formal endorsement of both Coolidge and Davis, said:

"There are in America two great political parties. These two great parties, in solemn convention, this year adopted platforms which provide a home in either party for the conscientious Klansmen thereof."

The Klan Against La Follette

Imperial Wizard Evans, at the West Virginia Klan Konklave, said:

"La Follette is the arch enemy. * * * The Klan will bend every effort to defeat the candidacy of Robert M. La Follette, third party contestant for the Presidency."

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La Follette was the first Presidential candidate in the present campaign who **UNEQUIVOCALLY DENOUNCED** the Ku Klux Klan. He said:

"I am unalterably opposed to the evident purposes of that secret organization known as the Ku Klux Klan, as disclosed by its public acts. It cannot long survive. Anyone familiar with my record, especially in my own state, knows that I have always stood without reservation against any discrimination between races, classes and creeds. I hold that every citizen is entitled to the full exercise of his constitutional rights."

If he had done nothing else, the colored citizens of this country should give La Follette their unstinted support.

Moreover, he is the **ONLY ONE** of the three candidates whom the KLAN OPPOSES.

Senator La Follette championed the cause of the Negroes in the race riots in Chicago, East St. Louis, New York, and Washington in 1917, 1918, and 1919. A signed editorial in his magazine for August, 1919, is one of the strongest ever written on that subject. He wrote:

"The mobbing of harmless, helpless Negroes in the Capital of this country is the nation's everlasting shame.

"The responsibility for starting the riots, which ruled Washington for days, rests upon disorderly, lawless whites.

"Peaceable, unoffending colored men and boys were beaten up and murdered by brutes who boast of our white civilization.

"A reign of hysteria and terror prevailed throughout the sections of the city where the colored population resides. They feared a 'new East St. Louis.' They armed themselves as best they could and barricaded their homes. There were colored soldiers among them who had served with distinction in France, some of whom had been wounded 'fighting to make the world safe for democracy.'

"While the United States Senate was debating the League of Nations, which would make us the custodians of peace and the instructors in democratic ideals to less enlightened peoples, we were murdering innocent, intelligent, God fearing, law abiding colored citizens at the back door of the White House."

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A two-page article in La Follette's Magazine for January 24, 1914, when the Woodrow Wilson "Jim Crow" policy was being put into effect, denounced an instance of race prejudice and segregation in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, and said that the Negroes had submitted to discrimination in travel, in hotels, in public entertainments, in schools and churches; that under conservative leaders they had remained silent when deprived of the ballot, depending on their economic and educational progress to bring them justice and recognition through a gradual evolution in public sentiment.

"But to have the United States Government take a backward step," the article continued, "to have the color line drawn in places they have won on their merit, to be humiliated, repressed and degraded at the Capital of the nation by their own government, which has no right to discriminate among its citizens, is a body blow to hope and pride and incentive.

"The colored people have shown remarkable self-restraint and dignity with the increase of educational

advantages. They are more and more demonstrating their power of self-help and of separate race development. We should remember it is not the industrious, intelligent, prosperous, free element of any race that threatens society; it is the idle, ignorant, repressed that constitute the menace.

"Continued violations of fundamental principles of human rights touching a race that constitutes one-tenth of our citizenship must ultimately degrade our standards, corrupt our ideals, and destroy our sense of democracy.

"It is more truly for the good of the Caucasian than the Ethiopian race that we call a halt and take an accounting as to what unjust discrimination against the colored civil service employees means to our national life. It is in no way a matter of social privilege. It is a matter of civic right."

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The cause of Negro education has received substantial aid from Robert M. La Follette. In March, 1924, he was instrumental in securing an appropriation of \$365,000 from Congress for new buildings and equipment for Howard University, the colored college in Washington, D. C.

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It is an axiom that a man's past actions form a good barometer of what may be expected of him in the future. The past actions of the Democratic and Republican parties prove that the colored people can expect no real help from them. The record of Robert M. La Follette on matters concerning colored citizens, in 35 years of public service, stands unblemished.

Bishop John Hurst Endorses La Follette

Bishop John Hurst, of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, one of the outstanding clergymen among colored people, says of Senator La Follette and the Independent-Progressive movement:

"I am unreservedly for the Progressive candidacy of Senator La Follette and Senator Wheeler for President and Vice President of the United States.

"It must be unmistakably plain to every colored American that there can be no hope for him politically, economically or spiritually under either the Republican or Democratic party.

"The Democratic party has long been the party of the Ku Klux Klan, the party of Jim Crow, disfranchisement and lynching. The Klan was founded in the South half a century ago and was revived in the South ten years ago. Whatever Mr. Davis, the Democratic candidate, may state as to his personal position on the Klan, no colored man will imagine for a moment that he can in any sense wipe out or offset his party's record.

"As for the Republican party, sixty years ago the party of Abraham Lincoln, it has now been taken over bodily by the Klan in the North. It is openly the Klan party in at least a dozen Northern states. Alone among the three candidates Mr. Coolidge has refused to open his lips on the subject of the Klan. The best that we have been able to get from the White House, despite repeated requests, not only by colored men of prominence but by other Americans who rightly object to the Klan on the ground of its fundamental un-Americanism, is a brief statement from the lily-white Mr. C. Bascom Slemph, Mr. Coolidge's secretary, to the effect that Mr. Coolidge is not a Klansman. How gratifying to learn that Mr. Coolidge does not put on a nightshirt and a pillowcase and join the night riders after supper!

"La Follette, on the other hand, is the only candidate who has come out vigorously against the Klan in words that no one can mistake. His entire career shows that he regards all Americans as equal, without regard for race or color. But even had he been totally silent, it would be folly at this time for colored Americans not to take advantage of the glorious opportunity furnished by the birth of this new party, not to ally themselves with it and show the Republican party that there is a limit to the endurance and to the patience of the colored American citizens.

"The colored people of America have been loyal and faithful to the Republican party for half a century. In return, they have received nothing but broken promises. The Republican party has deliberately taken advantage of the existing situation by which it knew that the Negro could not turn to the Democratic party to get justice.

"With the largest majority in Congress since the days of reconstruction, the Republicans allowed a handful of Southerners to filibuster the anti-lynching bill to death, and yet the Republican platform has the impudence and hypocrisy again to come out and urge an anti-lynching bill.

"The Democrats under Woodrow Wilson overthrew by force of arms the independent Republic of Haiti, the Negro republic in the Caribbean, which, under Toussaint L'Ouverture, achieved its independence in 1804, thus making it next to our own the second oldest republic in this hemisphere. In the course of this infamous conquest three thousand Haitians, innocent of any crime but that of being colored, and including women and children, were killed. Mr. Harding made a solemn pre-election promise to right this wrong, but the Republicans have only fastened the shackles more tightly upon that inoffensive little country.

"The progressives are pledged to the withdrawal of our occupation from Haiti.* Mr. La Follette fought vigorously against this infamous crime.

"In every way and from every standpoint, the Progressive movement opens the door of hope to the colored American as at no time in a generation."

*In his public address in Cincinnati, October 10, and again in Chicago October 11 last, Senator La Follette specifically pledged the immediate restoration of full autonomy to Haiti.